

An Annotated Analysis of Nashian Versification
for the Initiated

סֵפֶר הַכִּנָּה הַפְּרָעֶשׁ



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&

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WITHDRAWN

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Introduction

As someone somewhere famously observed: “There are rhymers, poets, and versifiers – in that order.” Given then, the general agreement that poetry, with its onomatopoeia, metaphors, similes, breadth and scope (*Divina Comedia*, *Paradise Lost*) is indubitably superior to rhyme (*e.g.*, ‘Thirty days hath September / April, June, and November’), the observation’s oft-cited¹ phrase ‘in that order’ would appear to be crying out in the street with its assertive implication that verse is superior to both rhyme and poem. After the initial discomfiture wrought of this claim, we recall, in a Pauline twinkle as it were, that the lines of sacred writing are referred to as *verses*, are they not – a fact, however alternative, that trumps further discussion.

– Q.E.D.

Quentin Edward Dunraven is perhaps least known as a deep-background redactor of such seminal works as ‘Hokusai’s Great Wave, *Annotated*’. Currently, he is Moses Seat Professor of reformed halakkah at Genizah University (Cairo, Illinois) where, as time permits, he is the emeritus post-graduate Reader of English Verse.

1 Clarification may be needed here. The phrase “in that order” is widely used, not the entire remark. – Ed.

Foreword

Ogden Nash has been moldering in the ground and collecting dust on shelves this past half-century. The resuscitation of his literary reputation, now underway (if not underfoot)², has perforce generated critical reassessments, especially in Japan, where the verse considered in this monograph is compared with *haiku*. Other verses are compared with other traditional forms. From Nagoya to Osaka,³ the *drôle* is on a roll.⁴ In Brazil, too. Stateside, consider:

Ogden Nash: *The Life and Work of America's Laureate of Light Verse* (2005), by Douglas M. Parker.

The laureate of light verse?

It could be so much worse.

– Ogden Nash, posthumously

To his credit, Parker quotes his subject's work and draws from correspondence. Still, the biography ignores the more profound aspects of Nash's ruminashions.⁵ Perhaps more nuanced is the emergent French view of the Yankee⁶ versifier, as recent publications suggest :

Nash en face d'LHOOQ (Paris : Éditions Trou Noir, 2019) ; *M. Nash à la neuvième Porte* (Puivert : Balkan & Corso, 2020) ; *Nash l'inconnu* (Avignon: Livres du Pont, 2021) ; etc.

As to an alliterative appreciation, resuscitation and/or rehabilitation, the rest rests with informed readers. Such as yourself. Maintenant, allons-y ...



2 Could not resist. - Ed.

3 Approximately 140 km, as the infant-laden stork flies.

4 Nash's epic *The Japanese*, published in 1938, is ancient history by current reckoning.

5 *Get it?* The astute reader will, of course, immediately recognize 'ruminations'.

6 Born in Rye, Nash would have loved New York, had he not loved Balti-more.

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סֵפֶר הַכְּנָה הַפְּרָעִשׁ

The Book of the Fleas

At long last, and thank you for your patience, here is Ogden Nash's immortal verse :

Fleas

Adam

Had 'em

To grasp the meaning encoded within Nash's verse, exposition is necessary – otherwise, there would be no *raison d'être* for this monograph and no prospect for enrichment of the authors and the publisher. That said, we begin with an elementary observation: *Adam* may not mean what the uninformed (read: 'uninitiated') reader may think. We will come to a realization of this point by and by; why because, to make a book, padding is required.

Stating the matter categorically, there is no archaeological, historical, or textual evidence that Adam did, in fact, have fleas. However, there is another sense in which this bold assertion is factually true.

The imagery of the verse is immediately perceptible. As a reduction, it is formidable in its compact precision. It distills the human condition in four syllables. Let us not overlook that 'four' is a significant number among Kabbalists, it being the number of worlds, in order, to wit : Atzilut, Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah. The order is descending. Here too, by and by, we will come to realize this point.

We all have, it must be said, a culturally conditioned inherent tendency⁷ to equate verse with rhyme :

Hickory, dickory dock / The mouse ran up the clock.

Nash's verse, as a matter of first impression, appears *de la même sorte* and not *sui generis*. How misleading impressions can be!⁸ Take, for instance, the subject 'Adam' himself, or even itself (!⁹).

ADAM – [Heb. ʾādām אָדָם] generally denotes 'human being'

HAD 'EM – [Am. Eng. həd'əm = had them (ME *theim* dat. pl.)]

thus : ʾādām / həd'əm

7 The capacity to hold two contradictory ideas in mind, simultaneously, is a sign of first-rate intelligence. See: *The Great Gatsby*, page 1; also 'Hokusai's Great Wave, *Annotated*' (Tristan de Cunha: Ark Press, 1997); note 110.

8 Punctuation as employed by born-again Evangelicals.

9 Commonly substituted with ☺

This is an example, not of rhyme, but of assonance. Further, *Adam* may not refer to an individual, at all – in which case, there is no evidence for fleas. However, should *Adam* be construed to mean ‘humanity’ (the man and the woman are both called ‘Adam’ at Genesis 5:2), it becomes apparent that fleas are a possibility, along with head lice, intestinal worms, oily discharge, acne, and dandruff. We see, then, that Nash’s versified vision encompasses the sum total of our human condition.

Before addressing the implications of Nash’s reductive aesthetic, it seems advisable to recall this statement made during an interview in 1958 : "I think in terms of rhyme, and have since I was six years old".¹⁰ Born in 1902, Nash would have been too young, and too far removed from Zurich to know anything about, or to have been influenced by, the anti-art movement of Tristan Tzara, yclept *dada* – nor was he any longer in New York at the arrival of the European *avant-garde*. He was then in Savannah, Georgia and later Newport, Rhode Island. Whether he absorbed a European immigrant’s sensibility while attending his single year at Harvard is an open question. Who knows what Nash might have picked up from his editor, Harold Ross of *The New Yorker*, where he worked in the editorial staff in 1931.

In analyzing the development of his craft, we are fortunate to have Nash’s preparatory efforts: rough drafts, journal entries, notes in cypher,¹¹ and his voluminous correspondence. These papers are preserved in the library of Manshu International University at Tristan de Cunha, where they have resided since their forwarding from Genizah University in Cairo, Illinois at the outbreak of Covid-19.

As of this writing, there exist on-going negotiations to make high-resolution scans of these documents and to make them freely available via Wikisource; however, funding is still lacking. There are also unsubstantiated rumors of a legal action to secure copyright, brought by a member of the Billionaire Club International.



¹⁰ *Prescott Evening Courier* (1 December 1958). Interview conducted by Hal Boyle.

¹¹ See Addenda, *infra*

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Addenda

re Note 11: Ogden Nash's cypher-verses, the following examples are characteristic

ON-241.1

vt blefa lingua bland

f. lvas acnt

ON-243

funt qui diž

dedužis ndum

N.B. Decimal points indicate the number of a draft; 241.1 is a first draft, 241.2 is a second draft, and so forth. Hundreds of these texts are extant, each with multiple drafts.

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